CALSS
Colorado Association of Legal Support Staff

DeNovo

Colorado Association of Legal Support Staff

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From the Editor

We are always looking for contributors to the De Novo. If you would like to submit an article to be considered for publication, please contact me at vschermerhorn@sgrllc.com. I would love to hear from you about any learning experience you have had, a seminar you attended, or a matter of general interest to De Novo readers. Also, if there is anything you would like to see information on, please send me suggestions and I will see what I can find on the topic. I look forward to hearing from you!

Ginny Schermerhorn, Bulletin Editor

New Year's Resolution: Buff up your bio for 2011

By: Janet Ellen Raasch

This time of year, many of us resolve to buff up our physical appearance – but what about our personal and professional appearance online?

Attorney biographies are the *most-frequently visited* pages on law firm websites and can make a strong first impression -- or no impression at all. Referrals are important but, in the Internet age, potential clients, reporters and conference planners will almost always use online attorney bios to *validate* a referral before actually making contact.

In spite of their popularity with users, most attorney bio pages are "flabby" and make a non-descript first impression.

Here are some easy steps you can take to get your attorney bios in shape.

Think like a reporter. Make the first sentence of each bio not a generic statement – but a news lead. What makes this lawyer unique among his or her peers? What kinds of problems are clients facing – newsworthy problems that this lawyer can solve? Don't start with the kind of law practiced, but with the kinds of business or personal problems solved. There is no place for generic material like licensure, schools or practice areas in your narrative; generic material should be pulled from a database and run alongside.

Tell stories. Research shows that people remember and repeat stories much more often than abstract qualities. Instead of simply citing a category of work or a representative case or matter, tell a "case story." This is also a great place to indicate some of your values as a practitioner and demonstrate your level of client service.

Case stories can be told in four simple sentences (with a link to a more detailed case study, if necessary). Define the client (with permission) and industry. State the problem faced by the client. State the smart and cost-effective solution you provided. State the positive business or personal outcome for the client. Once written, good case stores can also be used in practice/industry areas and pulled from the database to use in proposals.

Demonstrate values. At a certain level, legal skill is a given and clients decide which lawyer (or law firm) to hire on the basis of values – all things being equal, they retain lawyers they know, trust and like. A good way to demonstrate values is to include short quotes from the lawyer – usually as break-out quotes rather than within the narrative. What does the lawyer love about his area of practice or industry? What was the lawyer's favorite case, and why? What was the best piece of advice the lawyer received from a mentor? What does the lawyer do outside the office – in the community or with family?

Multiply your media. Most traditional lawyer biographies limit their "multi-media" capacity to a photo and perhaps a few links to the full text of articles and other written content. The best modern bios are like personal home pages -- with links to audio, video and the lawyer's social media sites. Robert Algeri of Great Jakes gives the cutting-edge advice to think of each lawyer bio as an independent, free-standing, multiple-paged professional micro-site.

Lawyer bios are the most-valuable and least-leveraged real estate on any law firm's website. In 2011, resolve to buff up your firm's flabby bios.

Janet Ellen Raasch is an experienced writer and ghostwriter who works closely with professional services providers – especially lawyers, law firms and consultants to the legal industry. She helps these professionals enhance their online reputations and achieve new business through publication of keyword-rich content for the Internet as well as copy for traditional print media.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT: Although the above article refers to attorney bios, I included it because I believe some of the suggestions may be modified and applied to help us improve our professional resumes.

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Law firm dress code: External restriction or internal guide?

Janet Ellen Raasch

The subject of law firm dress codes is guaranteed to get an animated response from any legal administrator.

Over the past decade, casual-Friday or casual-daily dress at law firms has become extremely popular with both staff and lawyers. Currently, the pendulum is swinging back to more formal business dress – strongly so in the major cities of the East Coast and increasingly so in the more casual cities of the Midwest and West Coast.

How does an administrator encourage staff and lawyers to adopt more formal business attire without having to rescind privileges that people have grown accustomed to?

"If you demonstrate to your staff and lawyers how their personal business style is closely linked with their ongoing career success, they will start to pay attention," said Doug Paris. "They will not need an external code. They will dress appropriately because their internal code tells them that it is in their best interest to do so."

Paris addressed the subject of law firm dress codes at the monthly educational luncheon of the Mile High Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators (www.milehighala.org), held Oct. 18 at The Adams Mark Hotel in Denver.

Paris is founder of Denver-based Doug Paris Wardrobe & Design (www.parisdesignonline.com). He provides wardrobe design and consultation services to men and women who want to advance their careers as executives, managers, sales professionals and entrepreneurs. He is author of *Style: A Life's Work.*

"Although my clients may differ in many of the details of their lives, the one thing they all share – no matter what their budget – is a desire to ensure that their personal style reflects their individuality and their unique purpose in life," said Paris.

Enhance your style

Success in the legal field is based on skill, but also on relationships. "One of the key elements of any relationship, with both clients and colleagues, is respect," said Paris. "The way you dress tells clients and colleagues that you respect them – and that you respect yourself. Individuals who dress well command respect and increase their effectiveness in the workplace.

"When choosing a business wardrobe, consider your personal style – *who* you are at the core of your personality and how your clothes reflect this," said Paris. "Then, enhance your personal style through wardrobe in a way that helps you achieve your business goals and objectives – *what* you want to achieve professionally.

"Be careful that you do not confuse style with fashion," said Paris. "Style is timeless and defines the individual. It is built upon the classics. Fashion is transient and embraced by the masses. It is built upon trends. No matter what your wardrobe budget, invest most of it on style. For fun, spend a little bit on fashion."

"Business casual" is appropriate for casual-Friday or casual-daily law offices. "When people who work at law firms hear the words 'business casual,' both men and women should think in terms of three pieces of clothing," said Paris.

"For men, this consists of a sport coat or sweater over a casual shirt and nice slacks," said Paris. "An updated look is to wear a suit with a light-weight mock-turtleneck or an open-collar woven shirt. Women can wear a jacket or sweater ensemble.

"Khakis, jeans and knit shirts are weekend casual – not business casual," said Paris. "In my opinion, they should not be worn at any time in a professional office by those who want to demonstrate respect for themselves, their colleagues and their clients.

"Shorts, tank tops, and anything too tight or too loose are also unacceptable," said Paris. "From an HR point of view, the more skin, the more risk."

Rules for the wardrobe

For those who want to "invest" in a business wardrobe, stressing quality over quantity, Paris recommends the 4x4x4 rule. "Less can be more if you buy coordinated classics – four jackets, four skirts or pants, and four shirts or tops. This simple start gives you 64 combinations – enough to wear a different outfit each day for two whole months."

Another one of Paris' rules for enhancing style is to pay close attention to the top ten inches of your body and the lower ten inches. People will notice these areas first.

"The top ten includes your head and neck – starting with a friendly smile," said Paris. "Find a haircut and eye-glasses that flatter your features – updated, but not copying the latest celebrity. Women should wear subtle (not dangling) jewelry of the best quality they can afford; scarves should be subtle woven silk or cashmere. Men's ties should follow the same guidelines. If someone calls your neckwear 'snappy,' think twice."

The lower ten includes footwear and stockings. "Men will rarely go wrong using a black cap-toe dress shoe as a wardrobe basic," said Paris. "Stockings should be quality fabric and calf-length. Women should focus on closed-toe pumps in several colors and should wear stockings – always in winter and virtually always in summer."

Neither men nor women should ever wear sports shoes, sandals or flip-flops to the office – even at offices that are casual-Friday or casual-daily. Loafers are a classic casual choice.

"The rules will get you through most workplace situations," said Paris. "Once you know the rules, it can be fun to break them – on purpose and with attitude to reflect your unique style, not by accident because you don't know any better."

Invitation consternation

Invitations to social events are confusing to many people. "You may see 'smart casual,' 'dressy casual,' or 'professional casual' referenced on an invitation," said Paris. "In general, this means the same three pieces as business casual – but with an upgrade in fabric quality and construction. This is when you replace cotton and wool with silk and cashmere."

If an invitation says 'informal' or 'formal,' the first thing to check is time of day.

For informal and *before* 6 p.m., men may wear a sport coat with an open-collar woven shirt or merino-wool mock-turtleneck shirt. After 6 p.m., add a tie or upgrade the turtleneck to silk or cashmere. Women can take a less-tailored approach than they use at the workplace – a blouse or sweater-set *before* 6 p.m. and fine, less-constructed clothing in natural fabrics *after* 6 p.m.

"For formal and *before* 6 p.m., dress is a dark suit and tie for men and tailored business wear for women," said Paris. "For formal and *after* 6 p.m., dress is black tie for both men and women. A woman may also wear an embellished evening suit."

Black tie is the most common formal event. For men, this means a traditional tuxedo. "In my opinion, black tie is never *optional* – no matter what the invitation says," said Paris. "If it's on the invitation, and you want to enhance your style, you wear it." For women, black tie means a long (preferably) or short formal gown.

White tie calls for the most formal of evening attire. A man wears a tailcoat, a white pique vest and a white tie. A woman wears a very formal long evening gown and may wear long gloves.

"Whether casual Friday at the law firm or a black tie event with an important client – appropriate dress enhances an individual's unique style and purpose in life," said Paris. "Once this is understood, a dress code should not be necessary."

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

February 5, 2011 - CALSS Second Board Meeting & Educational Conference at IBMC, Longmont College, 2315 N. Main St., Longmont, CO 80501. Seminars are: "Outlook Tips & Tricks", and "I Didn't Know My Computer Could Do That!" CLE presenter will be Ms. Reba Nance, Director of Law Practice Management and Risk Management, of the Colorado Bar Association.

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ABOUT DeNOVO:

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All correspondence regarding content should be directed to the editor. Original articles may be submitted for publication, as well as reprints of previously published articles. In the latter case, please include author and publication information so appropriate reprinting permission may be obtained.

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